



**Coalition for
Environmental
Equity and
Economics**



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Dear Governor Newsom,

We are the leadership of a collaborative project called the Coalition for Environmental Equity and Economics (CEEE.) Founded by the organizational leadership of Green The Church, The Environmental Justice Coalition for Water, and the Council of Mexican Federations in North America (COFEM), we represent a collective of the African American clergy and congregations as well as the environmental justice (EJ), frontline, and Latino immigrant communities.

We write to you with concerned minds and distressed hearts. In early August, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a landmark study. The findings are stark and dire: the consequences of climate change are widespread, rapid, and intensifying. Today we find it hard to see a better future—the truth is that the consequences of climate change are severe.

Our communities—people of color who live in urban centers and rural regions—are most impacted by the inequities underscoring the global climate crisis. As temperatures reach record highs, essential air-conditioning is becoming increasingly unaffordable. With a deepening historic drought, potable water flows beyond the reach of already-stressed frontline communities. Clean air is also scarce, due to wildfires and polluting “peaker” plants activated in our neighborhoods to avoid power blackouts. We are “front of the line” in the exploitation by extractive companies that drive forward these unjust imbalances.

Community-Empowering Climate Solutions

Though the current state of climate change appears bleak, we believe there is an opportunity to propel forward a brighter future that centers frontline communities in the clean and just transitions of our power sources: a democratized, distributed, and decentralized energy system that uses existing, effective, and affordable clean technologies available for mass utilization.

Luckily, we already know of an accessible and efficient tool for this system: on-site photovoltaic solar panels and battery storage on the roofs and in the yards of homes, apartment buildings, churches, schools, and businesses, enabled through Net Energy Metering (NEM). Roughly 10% of California ratepayers have solar panels on their roofs, totaling more than a million consumers, enabled through NEM, our state’s foundational consumer solar program. We believe that millions more could benefit from the ongoing propagation of clean energy technologies that empower communities in navigating our precarious climate future.



The Coalition for Environmental Equity and Economics

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Standing Against Profit-Driven Monopolies

We formed CEEE after watching the political machinations in this year's legislative session around Assembly Bill 1139. The bill was sponsored by the International Brotherhood of Workers (IBEW.) In truth, it was masterminded by the investor-owned utilities (IOUs)—namely, Pacific Gas & Electric, Southern California Edison, and San Diego Gas & Electric. AB 1139 attempted to codify the idea of a “cost shift” to non-solar customers when another household purchases solar.

As environmental justice advocates, we were alarmed by this deception. We understand the issue well, and we know the IOU cost-shift argument is falsely constructed. It's simple logic: removing a customer's energy load from the transmission grid reduces wear and tear on the grid, which saves everyone money. The utility argument of the distribution of rate hikes is absurd and contradicted by mounting evidence from the state's own data. Governor Newsom, while we believe that there is room to make solar more equitable, their cost-shift claim is NOT true and punishes those who are committed to a cleaner, cheaper, and more resilient energy future, and is counterproductive to your personal history of progressive clean energy policymaking.

It seems that the motivations of the IOUs are to avoid a profit shift. This reveals the true cause of the rate hikes: the centralized energy and utility profit model. The EJ community is calling for affordable, accessible, and clean energy across the state at the community level. We wish to take advantage of existing programs like NEM that allow our neighborhoods to switch to sustainable and decentralized energy, free from the profit-driven dominance of utility companies.

Advocating for True Environmental Justice

While the IOUs and their allies claim that NEM is inequitable, CEEE believes that the true inequity lies in our current energy system structured within an extractive economy. We see a real, existing opportunity for environmental justice that ignores utility profit gain and instead prioritizes communities that have been hit hardest by IOU negligence, increasing rate hikes, and failing infrastructure.

Rooftop solar and battery storage provide our communities social benefits beyond just consumer affordability. We want cleaner air. We want a future free from destructive IOU-caused wildfire risk and increasing blackouts. And we envision an equitable forecast for energy democracy—a system that allows members of our community to take control of how we power our lights, stay cool in a changing climate, and decommission the peaker plants that have polluted our neighborhoods for generations.

It is clear to us that NEM and state programs such as Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing (SO-MAH), Disadvantaged Communities-Single Family Solar Homes (DAC-SASH), Solar Generation Incentive Program (SGIP), and the California Solar Incentive (CSI) have collectively helped create accessible ways for working families, schools, churches, and small businesses to leverage the power of the sun.



The race-baiting tactics of the IOUs and their unions disconnected from frontline families are patronizing; they homogenize our neighborhoods under the duplicitous veil of so-called equity. Our purpose as environmental justice leaders is to advocate for and empower our communities in the pursuit of a truly equitable climate future. We will not tolerate efforts to misinform our communities with false narratives and we expect you, as the state's leader, to support communities of color by instructing your staff and agencies to not tolerate them as well.

The utilities are proposing to make consumer solar two times more expensive than it is today while slashing the value of solar electricity sent back to the grid by 77% during the summer. Rather than bolstering equity, this proposal would make solar out of reach for most low- and middle-income consumers. We find it outrageous that IOUs present this proposal just when recent studies showed that working families make up nearly 50% of today's market. NEM benefits the 150,000 CARE customers receiving subsidies for solar, while also bolstering local economic growth that has supported thousands of small businesses and created over 70,000 quality jobs across the state. The math is simple: when going solar is no longer financially viable, our communities will be shut out from being able to afford clean technologies, build community-based resilience hubs, and be forced to rely on failing IOU infrastructure.

The IOUs are presenting a proposal that would make California the most expensive place to have residential solar in the U.S., while also increasing rates for our schools and places of work by thousands of dollars per month. Your legacy for the Golden State depends on our ability to withstand a changing climate and hold utilities accountable for their inefficient and socially irresponsible profit model.

Building Equitable Change for Communities

Governor Newsom this moment is one of the most important in human history. Climate change is an existential threat to our planet and its people. We have young children (as you do) and grandchildren who face the future with trepidation. For them, we need to make a choice. We can either continue to listen to the lies and manipulations of those interested only in maximizing their profits and perpetuating the use of fossil fuels, or we can move forward powered by moral courage and begin the steps to reverse climate change

Your actions can be instrumental in bringing the extraordinary vision of a sustainable California to fruition. We strongly encourage you to use your enormous influence to persuade the California Public Utilities Commission to strengthen, not weaken, the state's NEM program and encourage additional incentives to advance the growth of on-site solar and a decentralized energy grid for California's underserved communities. After all, **NEM is a critical tool in empowering frontline communities to build resilience in the face of climate change.** **Solidifying these public policies will create a cleaner and more just Golden State. If you do so, after all is said and done, that will be your greatest historical legacy.**



Esperanza Vielma

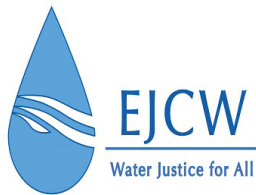
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